

Executive Summary

Leadership of today's schools must focus on improvement of teaching and student learning. More than ever, schools, leaders and teachers, and even students are being held accountable for the learning that takes place. The current shortage of highly qualified school leaders has far reaching effects on the advancement of student achievement. Communities, school personnel, and those responsible for making policies can contribute to improvement of conditions in order to attract highly qualified individuals into school leadership positions. In this shortage environment it is important to develop local teacher leaders, provide them with leadership experiences, and support them in the advancement of their careers, with hope that they will become the school leaders of tomorrow.

Overall, this report covers the following topics and includes suggestions listed below (adapted in part from *Leadership for Student Learning: Reinventing the Principalship*, 2000).

1. Effective school leaders should be provided by:

- raising entry and exit standards of preparation programs
- exploring alternate paths to leadership positions for capable leaders
- improving recruitment practices, specifically prepare local teacher leaders for eventual leadership positions
- increasing the number of women and minorities in school leadership positions—specifically put more women into leadership in secondary principalship and in the superintendency, more minorities in leadership positions other than in urban schools
- connecting the daily realities and needs of schools, with hands-on leadership opportunities in the design of preparation programs for educational leadership

2. The profession should be supported by:

- emphasizing leadership for student learning in preparation programs and in professional development
- improving on-going training
- providing networks and mentors for school leaders
- improving salaries and recognition in order to attract and retain the best candidates for the job
- restructuring the job to allow accommodation of leader strengths, interests, and limitations, since many view school leadership positions as not “doable”
- giving school leaders the needed amount of autonomy and authority
- improving conditions for school leaders’ portability of their professional skills and credentials without loss of retirement benefits and encourage effective school leaders to remain on the job

3. Quality and results should be guaranteed by:

- focusing recruitment and retention efforts on leadership for student learning
- improving leader evaluation practices designed to generate information for professional growth and school improvement
- holding leaders accountable for their role in improving student learning by establishing rigorous and fair systems
- developing high standards for school leaders and more rigorous means of credentialing them

Shortage of Qualified School Leaders in Montana

Almost every survey of school leaders in Montana indicates there is, and will be to a greater extent, a shortage of school leaders in the state. One indicator of that shortage is the number of administrators that will be retiring. According to the certificates issued in the state of Montana during 1996-97, within 10 years nearly 50% of the principals and 60% of the superintendents will be new to their position, since many of the current administrators are likely to have retired by 2007 (Office of Public Instruction, 1999). The Montana School Boards Association (1999) sponsored a study focused on the shortage of qualified principals and superintendents in the state. The study found that of the 105 responding superintendents, 50% were planning on retiring within the next five years. Of the 126 principals, 26% were planning on retiring within the same time period.

Problems in Hiring

Of the 73 school board chairs and of the 67 superintendents who had hired administrators in the last three years, only 20 school board chairs and 10 superintendents indicated having no problems in filling the open positions (Montana School Boards Associa-

tion, 1999). Most often, board chairs and superintendents indicated the pool of applicants was too small, or individuals in the pool were not well qualified.

The Montana Statewide Education Profile, published by the Office of Public Instruction (2001) reports that in the 1998-99 school year, school districts were beginning to experience more difficulty filling teaching and administrative positions than in the past. Another indication that teacher and administrator positions would get more and more difficult to fill was the drop in the number of initial teacher certifications issued by Office of Public Instruction from 1996-97 to 1998-99. There was a 6% decline in the number of certificates issued during that time period.

However, a recent study conducted by the Certification Standards and Practices Advisory Council of the Montana Board of Public Education found that of the 354 school systems with accredited schools who filed fall reports for the 1999-2000 school year, only 5% indicated they found the principal position hard to fill during the last five years (Nielson, 2001). Only 2% indicated it was difficult to fill a superintendent position during that time period.

***Individuals Qualified for Administrative Positions
But Not Working in the Position***

Most of the respondents in a study of individuals qualified for administrative jobs, but not currently working in administrative positions indicated they were from the most populated areas in the state (Montana School Boards Association, 1999). Relocation issues along with salary issues, were contributing reasons why these individuals decided not to pursue or take administrative positions outside of their communities. These individuals indicated that 54% of them planned to apply for administrative positions in the future, but most indicated they had not yet decided when they would apply. The next most common response was they would apply within the next two years.

Comparison of Best Practice to Current Practice in Montana

The report includes information comparing national research to what is being done in Montana throughout the six major topics found in the report.

Topic I: State Approaches to Educational Leadership

According to the Council of Chief State School Officials, the primary goal of educational leadership is to improve student learning. Consequently, many states have adopted the Council's Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISSLC) standards as a basis for accrediting preparation programs for educational leaders, and assessing individuals for administrative certification. Additionally, preparation programs for educational leadership are using the standards as a basis for program development and assessment. Also, states are using the National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) standards as a basis for college accreditation standards.

The state of Montana attempted to embed the NCATE standards inside of its unit standards (see Professional Educator Preparation Program Standards in Appendix A). Unit standards pertain to the overall administrative unit that houses professional educator preparation programs. The effect of this has been to shift the emphasis of accreditation from inputs to performance outcomes, and to align state standards with those nationally recognized by the profession. Currently, a new draft of the NCATE Standards appears to mirror the ISSLC Standards. The ISSLC Standards have been used in development of the educational leadership program at Montana State University in Bozeman.

Topic II.: The Candidate Pool

Montana and regional school administrators, and those aspiring to the profession, typically explain the same reasons that others like them around the nation give for barriers to working in the field. In Montana a study of individuals qualified, but not working in administrative positions, said most often that they were place bound, unable to move their family, or could not relocate in order to take an administrative position (Montana School Boards Association, 1999). They also explained that most often other reasons for not ap-

plying for administrative jobs were because of the low salaries associated with increasing job responsibilities, conflicts with their desired life style, and longer working hours an administrative position would bring. In the same study school board chairs and superintendents ranked inadequate school funding as the top problem faced by school administrators, while principals ranked working long hours as their top problem. Other problems ranked in the top four by school board chairs, superintendents, and principals were conflicts with parents/community, job too stressful, salary too low for job responsibilities, collective bargaining/labor relations, and societal problems such as poverty and no family support.

Similarly, Wolverton et al (2001) found that most superintendents in the region, who were not working in the position, were doing so because they were content with their current positions. They also explained that low pay differentials, stress, and politics associated with the position were disincentives. Current superintendents in the study rated all constraints higher than non- superintendents, leading the authors to conclude that perhaps the actual realities of the job may make the position even more undesirable than aspirants might imagine.

The literature referred to perhaps the best solution in filling vacant school administrative positions as the “grow your own” approach. Here, teacher leaders are identified within the school, encouraged to pursue leadership positions, and given opportunities to lead.

A high percentage of Montana school board chairs (68%), superintendents (76%), and principals (91%) indicated that they informally encourage individuals within their school districts to apply for administrative positions (Montana School Boards Association, 1999). However, most of the school board chairs (88%) said they did not have a formal plan to recruit administrators in their districts.

The most optimal scenario would be one in which the school district sponsors the teacher leader by providing release time and money for study that leads to administrator certification. A vital part of this time should be allocated to these individuals to do extensive

internships in educational leadership. The effectiveness of aspiring principal programs that are used to recruit teachers into administration was also explained in the literature. Aspiring principal programs have been conducted in Montana with joint effort from university preparation programs and state associations for elementary and secondary school principals. The literature was also clear about the effectiveness of establishing formal recruitment strategies and mentoring programs for principals. School districts in Montana generally do not have formal recruitment procedures or mentoring programs for new principals. However, the Montana Association for School Superintendents does have a mentoring program for new superintendents.

Perhaps, as some researchers concluded, one of the most effective ways to make the school leader's position more attractive would be to restructure the job. Currently, some school districts in the nation are experimenting with co-principalships, while others, even in small school districts in Montana, are sharing superintendents.

Many states are shifting the power from the state to local communities to make hiring decisions of their school leaders. In Montana the local school board has the ultimate responsibility to "employ or dismiss a teacher, principal, or other assistant upon the recommendation of the district superintendent, the county high school principal, or other principal as the board considers necessary, accepting or rejecting any recommendation as the trustees in their sole discretion determine. . . .(MCA 20-3-324) (School laws of Montana, 2000). Under state law, principals can be granted tenure, but tenure does not exist in state law for superintendents.

Topic III.: Education and Professional Learning

The Council of Chief State School Officials recommends there be alignment between standards of preparation programs for educational leadership and licensure requirements. And since school leaders are being held more accountable, particularly for increased student achievement, they should receive extensive professional development opportunities

to help them meet the demands of the profession. Professional development for school leaders must be a balance of both management and leadership skills.

Over the last 20 years, Glass (2000) noted that 75% of the superintendents surveyed in a national study consistently evaluated their preparation programs as either “excellent” or “good”.

In Montana, school board chairs surveyed indicated that the superintendents with whom they had worked in the last three years were well prepared in the areas of finance/budget and curriculum, were adequately prepared in labor relations/collective bargaining and technology, and not prepared in the areas of community relations and leadership/change strategies (Montana School Boards Association, 1999). Superintendents surveyed indicated principals with whom they had worked in the last three years were well prepared in student management/ discipline and curriculum, were adequately prepared in staff relations and conflict management, and were not prepared in facilities planning and management and finance/budget. Most of the superintendents (43%) indicated they felt they were extremely or well prepared in school administration, or they were adequately prepared (42%). Principals most often indicated they were extremely or well prepared (48%), or adequately prepared (42%).

The literature explained the importance of the internship experience in the effectiveness of a preparation program for school leaders. It provides individuals with on the job experiences that researchers view as essential to learning leadership skills. Through this experience, a mentoring relationship is also established. The educational leadership program at Montana State University (MSU) in Bozeman includes an internship, or field experience, for students aspiring to the principalship or superintendency. MSU field experience is an individualized course that offers students the opportunity for guided field experience as a principal or superintendent in primarily K-12 educational agencies. The course is also included in the Office of Public Instruction (Office of Public Instruction) internship program and is offered at both the University of Montana and Montana State University.

Traditionally, the professional development needs of school leaders have been ignored. Inservice has been periodic, remedial, skills transferred from “experts” to school leaders who sit and listen, seen as a luxury and not essential by school districts, and too time and resource consuming. But in order for school leaders to meet the increasing demands for accountability in education, they need to be given extensive opportunities to learn and increase their skills. Professional development for school leaders should be ongoing if it is to result in significant change, and be embedded in individual and organizational development. It should support inquiry into and study of teaching and learning. School leaders learn as a result of training, practice, feedback, as well as individual reflection and group inquiry into their practice. Professional development for school leaders should be primarily school-focused, and embedded in the job.

In some locations, collaborations have been forged between universities and school districts in designing and delivering professional development opportunities. Mentoring is another approach used by school districts for professional development (London & Sinicki, 1999). Mentoring reduced isolation felt by many school leaders, and provided opportunities to reflect on, articulate, and better understand current trends and practices in education.

Professional development opportunities for school leaders vary from school district to school district in the state. A minimum of three days of professional development must be provided to each certified employee for continuous instructional and administrative improvement in order to meet accreditation standards (Office of Public Instruction, 2001). State statutes provide state funding for up to seven additional pupil-instruction-related days. Two of those days must be allocated for time to attend the October professional educator’s conferences, and at least one more day must be dedicated to professional development activities of the staff. No incentives currently exist for school districts to provide more than three days of professional development. Certified staff must provide evidence of professional development activities in order to renew their certificates.

Specifically, in order to renew administrative certificates (Class 3) candidates must verify one year of successful experience, or the equivalent, in the area of endorsement, plus presentation of acceptable evidence of 60 renewal units, both earned during the valid term of the certificate (Office of Public Instruction, 1999). See Appendix C for a complete listing of requirements for Class 3 administrative certification.

Professional development opportunities for school leaders in Montana are provided by the School Administrators of Montana. Affiliates of the organization serve groups of school superintendents, county superintendents, elementary/middle school principals, secondary school principals, and special education directors. Different conferences are held for each group individually throughout the year. Additionally, all groups meet in October for the Montana Conference on Educational Leadership, in association with the school boards association and the school business officials. Topics at these conferences are designed around the professional development needs of the groups' members. Most of the professional development opportunities at conferences focus on management issues.

The Montana Association for School Superintendents has a mentor program for new superintendents. A new superintendent is identified as a person moving from a principalship into a superintendency, or a superintendent from out of state moving into a superintendency in Montana. These new superintendents are assigned a mentor to work with them during their first year. The School Administrators of Montana offers a workshop in August for new superintendents and principals.

Recently the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation awarded money to the University of Montana, Montana State University, and the School Administrators of Montana. A web site set up at the University of Montana and maintained by the educational leadership group will provide school leaders with technology information. Montana State University in Bozeman will continue to offer annual leadership academies. Two academies have already been held. Regional workshops will be offered by the Burns Telecommunications Center at Montana State University in Bozeman, and will be based on regional technology needs of

school leaders. A summer workshop will be offered at the University of Montana and a distinguished scholar in the field of leadership and technology will present.

Topic IV.: Licensure, Certification, and Program Accreditation

Most states require a master's degree in educational leadership for certification. Graduate level coursework, professional development, internship experience, and inservice training are often required by many states for recertification. Many states have adopted competency-based assessment practices to determine licensure of school administrators. The ISSLC Standards have been used in competency-based assessments.

School leaders in Montana obtain certification by receiving a master's degree in educational leadership from an accredited college. Principals can be certified K-8, 5-12, or K-12. Additional coursework is required for superintendent certification. A provisional certificate is granted with expectations that individuals will meet standards for certification within a given time period. The Office of Public Instruction does offer an alternate route to administrative certification with their Office of Public Instruction Internship Program. Here, the intern is employed as a part-time or full-time administrator while continuing to work on certification.

Currently, a committee from the Certification Standards and Practices Advisory Council of the Montana Board of Public Education is meeting to revise Chapter 57 of the Montana Code that specifies certification requirements for educators.

Many preparation programs in the nation have used the ISSLC Standards in curriculum development. The standards have also been used to assess school leader competency upon completion of preparation programs, and used to qualify individuals for certification. Additionally, the ISSLC Standards have been used in development of the educational leadership program at Montana State University in Bozeman. The Montana Board of Public Education (2000) has issued professional educator preparation program standards for the state's university system. (See Appendix A). The state standards are not fully aligned to the NCATE standards (National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education).

Neither are the NCATE standards fully aligned to the ISSLC standards. However, a current draft of the new NCATE standards appear to be aligned to the ISSLC standards.

Topic V.: Conditions of Professional Practice

Perhaps one of the biggest disincentives for individuals seeking administrative positions in Montana is the low salary associated with the job's increased responsibilities. Montana superintendent, high school principal, and elementary school principal salaries were well below both the national and regional mean in 1997, according to a state-wide study conducted by the School Administrators of Montana. The biggest difference in salaries occurred between Montana superintendents and the national mean salary for superintendents. On average, Montana superintendents received \$43,309 less pay than superintendents around the nation. Additionally, Montana superintendents' salaries were \$23,816 below those in the Rocky Mountain region.

Superintendents and principals studied in Montana agree the three incentives that would most encourage them to remain in school administration were improved salaries, improved retirement benefits, and increased earning power after retirement (Montana School Boards Association, 1999). In the same study, school board chairs indicated the four incentives they used most often to keep qualified administrators were negotiating with the board for salary and benefits, offering competitive salary, paying dues for professional associations, and offering money and support to attend professional development activities.

The literature called for states to develop policies that enrich their pool of potential school leaders by enhancing retirement portability between other states. This could increase school leader's freedom to move across state boundaries without sacrificing retirement benefits, while also encouraging effective leaders to remain on the job. According to the Office of Public Instruction (1999) many of the current administrators are likely to have retired by 2007. Other studies of Montana superintendents and principals indicate a high percentage of current administrators are likely to retire within 5 to 10 years. One of the

biggest disincentives for school leaders in Montana is the lack of retirement portability. As explained above, superintendents and principals agreed that improved retirement benefits would encourage them to remain in school administration (Montana School Boards Association, 1999).

This section also covered the topic of superintendent and principal performance review. The literature claimed the ultimate aim of evaluating any school employee should be to increase the quality of education for students. For superintendents, performance evaluation should be a part of their contract in order to protect the superintendent from being fired for political reasons. However, in some studies the primary criteria used in evaluations was the relationship between the school board and superintendent. The portfolio approach has been advocated by some authors as an effective way to design principal evaluation, since it would meet the demands of traditional evaluation systems and also promote professional growth demonstrating links to student achievement.

Montana has no state-wide standard for superintendent or principal evaluation. School districts are free to adopt their own evaluation tools. Superintendents do not receive tenure under state law. Principals, however, can receive tenure.

The selection process of school leaders was discussed in this section. Typically in the nation, most school boards form their own search committees that are charged with selecting a superintendent. In fact, the smaller the school district the more likely this type of selection process is used. Larger districts are more likely to use a professional search consultant. The most useful selection practices, according to the literature, are those that focus on job-related information and sample actual job behaviors. Structured job interviews and assessment tasks are two of the most effective tools to use in selection. However, most superintendents in the nation surveyed indicated that most often they were selected because of their particular personal attributes. The smaller the school district, the more likely this was to occur.

Selection processes vary across Montana. Some districts use their own search committees, and some use a consultant from the Montana School Boards Association, local universities, or other organization. For the 2001-2002 school year, search consultants from the Montana School Boards Association were used in 8 of the 40 superintendent searches in the state.

Topic VI.: Governing Structures and Authority for Practice

New structural patterns for school governance are being tested throughout the United States. For example, some school districts are mandated by the state to establish school councils, or write school improvement plans. States such as Kentucky require each school district to use shared decision making in their school council. Typically, school councils across the nation are made up of a variety of constituents, and are aimed at giving individuals involved in the schooling process a voice in decision making. This approach represents the state's effort to shift power, autonomy, and authority to the local level while still maintaining its function of oversight and accountability.

The Education Commission of the States in 1999 issued a report from The National Commission on Governing America's Schools. Recommendations were to extend current governance structures to include a few experimental strategies, and to increase privatization of school governance.

Charter schools are one form of an experimental governance structure. They are allowed by law in 38 states. Current statistics show these schools serve a total of 518,609 students in 2,063 schools (Center for Education Reform, 2001). While they claim it is too early to measure charter schools' broad academic success, anecdotal evidence suggests that students are learning and excelling. No provisions exist in state law for charter schools in Montana.

In some states, departments of education have taken over poor performing schools. In certain cities mayoral takeovers of poor performing city schools have occurred. There is a lack of research on the effectiveness of both state and mayoral takeovers.

Many states are recognizing that principals are the administrative and instructional leaders of schools, therefore, they should be responsible for making decisions in these areas. Superintendents are also being held responsible for the care and supervision of schools. Some schools are adopting the Carver model of policy governance. The basic tenet of the model is that the school board makes policy and the superintendent is then allowed to carry it out. This implies that the school board is prohibited from involving itself in the day to day management of the school. However, the superintendent is equally responsible for successes and failures of the school district. The superintendent's decisions must be aligned with board policy and made within the limitations the school board chooses to place on the superintendent.

In Montana, school boards are responsible, among other things, for their school's academic program, and for all of the hiring and dismissal decisions in their school district (School laws of Montana, 2000) (see Appendix C). Each school must receive accreditation from the Office of Public Instruction. Effective September 1, 2001, schools that are in compliance with Montana Code 20-4-101, may be accredited for a period consisting of 1-5 years at the sole discretion of the Board of Public Education (K-12 education: 2001 legislative session summary of legislation related to K-12 education, 2001).

Superintendents in Montana are responsible, among other things, for the general supervision of all schools of the district, its students, and personnel employed by the district, carrying out the policies of the district, for instructional programs, and performing any other duties in connection with the district as the trustees may prescribe (School Laws of Montana, 2000, MCA 20-4-402) Principals employed in a district that also employs a superintendent are given the authority in the law to suspend for good cause any pupil of the school where the principal is employed.

Women and Minorities in Educational Leadership

Research points to the fact that one of the most effective ways to recruit individuals for leadership positions is to first look within the organization. Research on women in

school leadership favors this approach, since many women do not wish to relocate in order to take a leadership position. Additionally, since the majority of women teach at the elementary level, more leadership opportunities here should be made available. Many researchers point to the effectiveness of aspiring principal programs.

Although perceptions of a woman's ability to lead a school are changing, many still perceive women as lacking the necessary skills in school finance, building maintenance, or school discipline. Many women studied reported feeling the "good old boy" network hindered their ability to obtain leadership positions, and they felt discriminated against. Researchers call for support for women entering educational leadership from those already practicing in the field. Mentoring is one way to give aspiring and newly hired school leaders that support—for both women and men.

Women make up half of the enrollments across the nation in preparation programs for school leadership. Researchers advocate that a broad range of leadership theory be taught in preparation programs that focus on the strengths both men and women bring to leadership roles. An awareness of gender differences should be integrated in the curriculum. And since recruitment of women in to leadership preparation programs is not an issue any longer, the focus should now be on improving the hiring environment for women.

Twenty four percent of school leaders who held principal and superintendent certificates in Montana during 1998-99, were female (Office of Public Instruction, 2001). American Indian principals and superintendents made up only 2% of the certified administrative personnel. American Indian students during the same period made up 10.2% of the entire student population of the state. Other certified minority administrators made up .5% of the certified administrators.

In a study of superintendents in the northwest region, Wolverton et al. (2001) found that women were less likely to be married and more apt to be divorced than men. The authors concluded that this may signal that a potential personal conflict exists for women who wish to pursue professional goals while maintaining a family. The study found that

salaries did not differ across genders, but household incomes did. Women typically reported higher family incomes than men did, possibly indicating dual income families.

Women superintendents in the study were also more highly educated than men.

Recommendations for the Region

A report issued by the Northwest Regional Laboratory, (Wolverton, et al., 2001) which focused on the shortage of qualified superintendents in the region, made specific recommendations based on their study of the region's superintendents. States studied were Alaska, Idaho, Montana, Oregon, and Washington. The report studied responses from 522 superintendents and 658 superintendent certificate holders who were not currently superintendents in the region. Researchers concluded that the gap between positions available and applicants in the northwest region will, in all likelihood, widen rather than shrink in the future. Based on the study's findings, recommendations are to:

- **Establish district and statewide mentor programs, scholarships, fellowships, and sponsorship programs for potential applicants, especially for under-represented groups—women and minorities.** Teacher leaders should be identified early in their careers, provided with shadowing experiences and release time to pursue credentialing.
- **Create region-wide superintendent exchange programs.** Restrictive retirement plans can be used to the benefit of the region, if not the state. States should consider retirement system modifications that encourage superintendents to remain on the job beyond the current retirement age.
- **Alert future teachers to the possibilities of administrative leadership while they are still in their teacher preparation programs.** This could be done by adding leadership courses to their programs.

Finally a report for the Certification Standards and Practices Advisory Council of the Montana Board of Public Education, that focused on the shortage of teachers in Montana, issued possible strategies that may have an impact in reducing the amount of teacher shortages the state faces (Nielson, 2001). These strategies may also be applied to the shortage of school administrators in the state. Possible strategies are:

- Identify the qualities that make Montana a great place to live and teach, and formally market them.
- Designate an official statewide teacher job listing center or linked centers.
- Design transition programs for people with degrees outside of education.

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- Establish portable salaries and benefits.
- Identify the pool of potential applicants that could fill available jobs and tailor incentives to attract them.
- Formally acknowledge, at a high state policy level, that low salaries for teachers have created a crisis for Montana children, communities, and schools, and commit to dealing with the problem.
- Improve the retirement structure to keep teachers beyond 25 years, or to keep them teaching part-time after retirement.
- Provide support for student loan payments to attract new teachers and to keep teachers already in the system.
- Designate regional centers for teacher support and services.
- Formally establish criteria and identify shortage areas by . . . district size, student demographics, and geographic areas.
- Support and expand current internship programs that train certified staff on the job to switch over to shortage areas.
- Develop new and innovative internship programs for shortage areas.
- Support and expand collaborative efforts among school districts.

Additional Resources

The report contains appendices with national standards for educational leaders, proficiencies for principals, and state law regarding school board responsibilities.